

VZCZCXYZ0011
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAC #0661 3272120
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 232120Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0206
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

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VZCZCXYZ0011
RR RUEHWEB
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UNCLAS ASUNCION 000661

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA DAS MCCMULLEN, WHA/BSC MILTON DRUCKER, MARY DASHBACH
E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [ALOW](#)

SUBJECT: EMBASSY IS NOT SPARED AS CRIME CONTINUES TO RISE IN ASUNCION

REF: ASUNCION 512

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Over the course of the past six months, Asuncion has experienced a notable increase in crime. The crime wave has impacted the Embassy community, but most recently the Paraguayan National Police have reacted quickly to arrest suspects. Case in point: on November 16 the Paraguayan National Police successfully arrested the suspected assailant in the armed robbery of two Fulbright Scholars in downtown Asuncion. The robbery took place on November 11, at approximately 10:00 P.M. local time in a busy public area of central Asuncion. The investigation and successful arrest represents a rare success in what has been a year of rising crime and instability in Asuncion and Paraguay as whole. END SUMMARY.

Rising Anxiety over Crime

¶2. (U) In July 2009 the Paraguayan National Police Office of Public Affairs released updated crime statistics showing that violent crimes in Asuncion for 2009 had already surpassed the annual total for 2008 and that crime levels throughout the country were also up sharply. This information, although of debatable statistical veracity, added to the already rising sense of insecurity among Paraguayans. The media contribute to the general anxiety over crime by highlighting spectacular robberies and violent crimes with front page headlines and horrific photos. The overall sense of rising insecurity is only exacerbated by perception of widespread corruption and incompetence within the Paraguayan law enforcement elements. The Paraguayan National Police have been directly involved in several high profile criminal incidents this year; one being the attempted assassination of a Lebanese businessman by a police officer and another the kidnapping and eventual death of a teenager by a group involving police. Senior levels of the police are also tainted by allegations of corruption, with three different individuals holding the position of Commander of the National Police with the last calendar year, and one recently replaced Commander holding an ostentatious 15th birthday for his daughter with over 600 invited guests. Paraguayans can frequently be heard referring nostalgically to the days of the Stroessner dictatorship when crime was supposedly nonexistent and people could sleep soundly without locking their doors.

Embassy Not Immune

¶3. (SBU) Embassy personnel have not been immune to increasing

criminal activity in Asuncion. Within the last year Embassy housing has suffered one break-in, with a laptop computer and jewelry stolen, and another attempted burglary. Six vehicles belonging to mission personnel have been broken into with laptop computers, cash, and personal belongings stolen. Most seriously, a member of the Embassy staff was drugged, beaten, and robbed in early 2009. The armed robbery of November 11 is merely the latest criminal incident against Embassy personnel. The Regional Security Office has responded with regular security advisories, updated briefings, enhanced training for the local guard force, and strengthened cooperation with the Paraguayan National Police. The successful arrest and ensuing confession in the armed robbery on November 11, following a joint investigation and ruse operation, is an outstanding example of the Regional Security Office working with the Paraguayan National Police to protect American citizens.

14. (U) Although it is not surprising that the Embassy has not been spared from Asuncion's increasing crime, the large number of events that affect Embassy personnel is cause for concern. As the Government of Paraguay struggles to improve security, with the still unresolved kidnapping (see Reftel) shaking the confidence of the public, criminal activity is expected to continue to increase - and the Embassy will increase its vigilance accordingly.

AYALDE

=====CABLE ENDS=====